

Fading temple murals get U.S. preservation assistance



Ambassador Ralph Boyce (at right in photo) presented a check to the president of Chiang Mai University on Tuesday to assist the Faculty of Fine Arts in preserving 70-year-old murals at Wat Baan Koh in Lampang Province. The grant is part of the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural

Preservation, which was established by Congress in 2001 to support efforts to rescue cultural heritage that is fragile and in danger of being lost forever.

The over 2 million baht check presented by Ambassador Boyce represents the largest single grant being given in all of East Asia. The funding will allow the faculty and students from Chiang Mai University and Naresuan University to help restore a set of charming folk-art murals painted in the 1930s. In his speech describing the project on Tuesday at the University's American Corner, Ambassador Boyce related how the murals came to be 70 years ago:

"... a devout and creative monk came to the newly-built Wat Baan Koh and covered its walls with his imagination, inspired by the wat's palm leaf manuscripts of jatakas and the Ramayana. He painted faces of the monks he knew and faces of visitors, and gave the wat a contemporary look very different from the formal, elegant paintings that we associate with religious buildings. He showed that the stories of Buddha and Rama have intimate connections to the way people should live every day.

"I imagine that people at the time hoped that future generations would value the artist's vision. Their hope was well placed, since the Baan Koh Village and the monks of the wat honored this obligation. All these years, they alone have kept the paintings and the building in good repair. This has been a difficult task. The building leaks, as old buildings do, and the paintings are slowly wearing away. It is time now for us to help them.

Fading murals...

“Ajarn Vithi and Associate Professor M.L. Surasawasdi and their team of scholars from Chiang Mai University and Naresuan University are committed to assist in the care of Wat Baan Koh. Over the next 18 months, the team will not only repair the building and preserve the mural, but in doing so will also create a lasting relationship between the wat and village and the larger community of Lampang, Chiang Mai, and beyond, to safeguard this heritage. These connections are exactly the ‘culture’ that we want to preserve....”



The imaginative mural paintings at Wat Baan Koh have been wearing away through the years , but will soon be renovated thanks to this grant.